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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 005540

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2013

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SUBJECT: ITALIAN OFFICIALS RECEPTIVE TO U/S FEITH BRIEFING
ON GLOBAL FORCE POSTURE

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION EMIL SKODON FOR REASONS
1.5(B)(D)

1. (C) Summary. Senior Italian officials responded positively to U/S Feith's December 9 briefing on the USG strategy for global force repositioning. Important details will need to be worked out and existing legal arrangements may need to be modified but Defense Minister Martino and Prime Minister Berlusconi's Diplomatic Advisor, Giovanni Castellaneta, agreed that capabilities, not numbers, must be the measure of military effectiveness in today's threat environment. U/S Feith also had productive discussions during both meetings on Afghanistan, European security and Galileo. End Summary.

GLOBAL FORCE REPOSITIONING

2. (C) In separate meetings with Martino and Castellaneta, U/S Feith explained that the US is consulting with allies on the concept and strategy of a long-term, global realignment aimed at making US military forces more responsive to today's threats. Having forward deployed forces is less about having troops close to the fight these days than about harmonizing strategic political and military thinking needed for a stronger, more efficient alliance, he said. By transforming the US military into the most affordable, sustainable, capable and relevant forces possible, the US is demonstrating the strength of its commitment to its allies and partners worldwide. The US will need Italy and other allies to help explain to their public and parliaments that the rebasing concept is about building alliance capabilities, not about reducing numbers.

3. (C) U/S Feith reviewed the ten key points underlying USG rebasing considerations, and said that more detailed discussions will follow this first round of big-picture consultations. For Italy in particular, U/S Feith said the US is proposing to add a battalion at Vicenza, add two squadrons and remove an existing one at Aviano, consolidate the Sixth Fleet headquarters with another headquarters outside of Italy and relocate the flagship from Gaeta, and consolidate US Special Operations Forces (SOF) at Sigonella. With Italy's agreement, technical teams are prepared to conduct site surveys that would be the basis for the next round of policy level discussions, he said.

4. (C) Defense Minister Martino strongly agreed with the need for military restructuring to face new threats and stressed that all allies should be following the US lead in order to make the alliance as a whole more efficient. Local political reactions will likely prove the most difficult aspect to manage, he noted. The key will be to work out the legal arrangements needed for rapid decision-making and flexibility. Some marketing will be needed to sell the public and parliament on the proposed changes, such as another plus-up at Vicenza and an additional squadron at Aviano, Martino said. If done ahead of time, he added, there should be no problem. He did not object to site surveys but cautioned that they should be low key, with little or no publicity, to avoid generating opposition and rumours. Martino's Diplomatic Advisor, Francesco Trupiano, suggested that existing bilateral arrangements for US military presence in Italy may need to be modified. U/S Feith agreed that they would need to be reviewed comprehensively to ensure they are adequate for the type of rapid, flexible deployments called for by today's threats. Freedom of action is essential and in Italy and America's common interest. The US will work with Italy as a sovereign nation on the modalities required for rapid decision-making and force movements, U/S Feith said.

5. (C) Amb. Castellaneta also agreed that improved capabilities and greater flexibility will lead to a stronger, more relevant alliance. He told U/S Feith that it will help countries like Italy that are battling to keep NATO positioned at the core of European security if the basing realignment is seen by the public as an effort to increase, rather than diminish, US commitment to a strong NATO alliance. Castellaneta noted that existing legal arrangements should be reviewed and may need to be modified to ensure that US forces in Italy can operate, train and deploy as needed under the new plan. The logistical details will need to be worked at the military level but Italy agrees

in general with the concept at the political level, he said. PM Berlusconi's Military Advisor, General Leonardo Tricarico, who was at the meeting with Castellaneta, added that there would be local sensitivities to moving Sixth Fleet Command from Gaeta. U/S Feith and his delegation assured the Italians that the US plans to coordinate closely with national and local officials, including Italian base commanders, to make sure the proposed changes are well received.

AFGHANISTAN

16. (C) U/S Feith also raised three points on Afghanistan in both his meeting with Martino and with Castellaneta: Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), EU funding and judicial reform. He said Amb. Zal Khalilzad had urged him in a phone call that morning to encourage the Italians to contribute a PRT as soon as possible. PRTs are proving to be very valuable mechanisms for improving security and bolstering reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, he said. The US is encouraging NATO to expand its role in Afghanistan and has no objection to an Italian PRT under the NATO ISAF chain of command if that is Italy's preference, he said. Martino noted that the MOD's commitment depends on the size of the civilian component and the location of the PRT. A joint MFA-MOD team is scheduled to depart on December 10 to look at two locations under consideration. U/S Feith emphasized that PRTs are needed in new locations, not where capabilities already exist.

17. (C) In his meeting with Castellaneta, U/S Feith stressed that time is of the essence; Afghans need to see real improvements on the ground before the June elections. More EU funding is urgently needed for voter registration and other elections-related programs. Castellaneta said Italy, as EU President, has been pushing for more funds but admitted that some EU members are lagging behind. More resources and more momentum are also needed to energize Italy's efforts to reform Afghanistan's judiciary, U/S Feith said. Castellaneta responded that Italy had agreed to tackle the most difficult sector, and important progress is being made. Claudio Bisogniero, acting Political Director and the MFA's representative at the meeting, added that single-judge mobile courts are now operating in different locations around the country for one to three month periods. The judges are Italian trained and use a simplified criminal code condensed by a joint Italian-Afghan team from the unwieldy existing code to be more functional.

EUROPEAN SECURITY

18. (C) U/S Feith discussed European security with both Martino and Castellaneta. He told them both that the US is extremely concerned about the creation of a separate EU planning cell, a development the US sees as unnecessary and duplicative. Martino said an EU planning capability for autonomous operations made sense but only as a last resort, to be used after a NATO, Berlin Plus or EU/Framework Nation mission had been excluded. Even France had agreed to this understanding, Martino said, though French officials didn't want that known. Castellaneta also reassured U/S Feith that Italy was working with the UK and others within the EU to craft a solution that would be aimed at keeping NATO first and NATO strong. He said that he would be meeting later on Dec. 9 with his French, German and British colleagues to discuss the EU planning cell and the mutual defense clause in the IGC draft treaty.

GALILEO

19. (C) U/S Feith raised Galileo with Castellaneta and said the proposed system is a self-inflicted wound on the NATO alliance. Disagreements over frequency use must be resolved without damaging NATO or the US's warfighting capabilities, he emphasized. Castellaneta assured him that negotiations underway in Brussels would lead to an acceptable solution.

10. (U) U/S Feith has cleared this message.

11. (U) Kabul Minimize considered.

SEMBLER

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2003ROME05540 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL